

Senate Majority Policy Committee Hearing

Addressing the Rural Workforce Challenges – Population Decline, Labor and Housing Shortage

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Dr. Michael J. Reed, President

Pennsylvania College of Technology

Pennsylvania College of Technology is uniquely positioned to address rural workforce challenges. We offer approximately 100 STEM-related academic programs emphasizing hands-on, experiential learning, enabling us to provide a steady stream of highly trained graduates to address persistent skills gaps in business and industry.

In more than 150 industry-standard labs on our campuses, our students gain the real-world experience and skill sets to thrive and advance in a variety of high-demand career fields ranging from computer and polymer science, to heavy equipment and diesel, to aviation and automotive, to welding and metal fabrication, to civil engineering and construction.

It's why our overall graduate-placement rate is 96%—reaching 100% in many majors. We have over 2,000 industry partners, and, according to a 2022 Georgetown University study, Penn College's four-year graduates outpaced all four-year graduates at Pennsylvania public colleges and universities in both 10- and 15-year return on investment (ROI). We take great pride in the partnerships we have cultivated with employers in the region and across Pennsylvania, who are eager to hire as many graduates as we can produce.

That symbiotic relationship with business and industry has not developed by accident. It's foundational to our academic mission and model.

Industry input informs nearly all of what we do in our programs. It's crucial to our curriculum, our hands-on labs, the state-of-the-art equipment on which students learn, and the skills and problem-solving techniques they hone while with us.

We have industry advisory committees for every academic program that act as recommending bodies to faculty and administration, partnering with us for curriculum development, equipment acquisitions, and lab design. These industry partners hire our current students for prime internship opportunities and often bring them on as full-time employees after they graduate.

Additionally, nearly all of our Penn College faculty members have real-world experience in business and industry, and they are eager to impart their knowledge and know-how to students. Penn College students, on average, spend three hours in labs for every hour of classroom lecture with these industry experts. There is no substitute for that type of insight.

We routinely evaluate our program offerings, and only deliver programs that are in high demand. At Penn College, students can complement what they learn in classrooms and labs and unleash their innovative and creative spirit in other ways. At The Dr. Welch Workshop: A Makerspace at Penn College,

students can collaborate with classmates or work independently to test theories, explore ideas, and expand upon their real-world skills.

Student organizations are another outlet for unbound creativity. A prime example is our Baja SAE Club, in which students compete annually in national competitions conducted by the Society of Automotive Engineers. The competitions require schools to design, manufacture and build a single-seat, all-terrain vehicle to survive a host of challenges.

Students from multiple academic disciplines work cooperatively to build the vehicles, and the payoff has been two consecutive endurance race victories in 2022 against an impressive slate of prestigious institutions like Michigan, Michigan State, Purdue, Cornell, Rochester Institute of Technology, Case Western Reserve, Georgia Tech, Virginia Tech, Clemson, Auburn, and Texas A&M.

In addition to designing the car, team members spend countless hours manufacturing nearly all of its components, assembling the 300-plus-pound vehicle and testing its performance at a quarter-mile track, cleared by heavy construction equipment technology students at our Operations Training Site near Allenwood. The Baja Club's comprehensive effort encapsulates the best attributes of a hands-on Penn College education.

And this type of real-world learning opportunity doesn't end at our country's borders. Global Experience courses enable Penn College students to put into practice what they have learned at sites around the world, whether its Dental Hygiene students participating in clinical training in the Dominican Republic, or Nursing students assisting with a medical mission in Guatemala, or Human Services & Restorative Justice students developing and coordinating a summit on domestic violence in Alaska.

While Shannon Munro will provide a much deeper dive into what we offer related to apprenticeship training and upskilling of incumbent workers across the Commonwealth, I will tell you that it is yet another example of how Penn College responds nimbly to industry needs and develops the programs—credit and noncredit alike—to address them.

Thank you for your time today.